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MEMORANDUM TO V. J. JEROME

June 28, 1950

At the Jefferson School Inter-Seminar Symposium on "Science and
in the Fight for Peace and Socialism" held from Friday, June 23
June 25, a resolution was introduced calling on all scientists
and scientific workers to refuse to work on weapons of mass destruction --
nuclear and biological warfare. The resolution stated that no
scientist or scientific workers today can fight for peace unless he takes
action. The resolution also called for a campaign to be undertaken
among all professional organizations in which scientists are included
upon all scientists in the United States to take similar action.
The purpose of this should be to initiate a nation-wide campaign to this
effect which would establish contact with scientists in other countries
who have already taken such action.

During the discussion on the resolution, a motion to table was introduced
by a member of the Scientists' Branch of the Professional section. The
reason given was that such action would isolate Party scientists from the
other scientists and that, therefore, such action on the part of the
Party would be an example of Leftist-Sectarianism. The motion was
carried by the Conference with one negative vote. However, because of the
discussion other individuals participating in the Conference
strongly expressed doubts about the resolution. During the discussion
on the resolution the Organizational Secretary of the Professional Section
present but did not take part in the discussion. The individual from
the Branch who introduced the motion to table stated afterwards that this
had been discussed at the Branch and that he was reflecting the
views of the Branch. In addition it should be mentioned that this
was given the assignment of preparing a report on Scientists in the
Struggle for Peace six weeks before the Conference. Although they took the
assignment the Branch failed to bring any report on this question.

RUBEN, BARNARD

K.G.S. 573

MEMORANDUM TO V. J. JEROME

June 28, 1950

At the Jefferson School Inter-Seminar Symposium on "Science and Scientists in the Fight for Peace and Socialism" held from Friday, June 23 to Sunday, June 25, a resolution was introduced calling on all scientists and scientific workers to refuse to work on weapons of mass destruction -- the atom weapon and biological warfare. The resolution stated that no scientists or scientific workers today can fight for peace unless he takes such action. The resolution also called for a campaign to be undertaken in cultural and profession organizations in which scientists are included to call upon all scientists in the United States to take similar action. The purpose of this should be to initiate a nation-wide campaign to this effect which would establish contact with scientists in other countries x who have already taken such action.

During the discussion on the resolution, a motion to table was introduced by a member of the Scientists' Branch of the Professional section. The argument given was that such action would isolate Party scientists from the other working scientists and that, therefore, such action on the part of the Conference would be an example of Leftist-Sedarianism. The motion was passed by the Conference with one negative vote. However, because of the nature of the discussion other individuals participating in the Conference subsequently expressed doubts about the resolution. During the discussion on this resolution the Organizational Secretary of the Professional Section was present but did not take part in the discussion. The individual from this Branch who introduced the motion to table stated afterwards that this question had been discussed at the Branch and that he was reflecting the sentiments of the Branch. In addition it should be mentioned that this Branch was given the assignment of preparing a report on Scientists in the Struggle for Peace six weeks before the Conference. Although they took the assignment the Branch failed to bring any report on this question.

2

42-816
573

In addition to this, following the report on imperialism and genetics another member of this same Branch introduced a supplementary report on Prigant's article in La Pensée and in the report took the position that there exists in genetic circles in the Western world a school of non-Weismanian genetics which is not subject to the criticism Lysenko has made of classical genetics and that because of the failure to distinguish between the two schools of genetics Lysenko is in error in his characterization of neo-Mendelian genetics. In one more sense this was characterized by the Conference as a impermissible introduction of a third force in biology, and it is precisely these same non-Weismanians who must be made the main subject of attack today.

PLS
S. S. L.

By Bernard Rubin

First, before getting into the fact that Socialist Realism is the Marxist method of cultural work, -- a fact Finkelstein as well as so many other American Marxist cultural workers have completely ignored in their books -- let me agree unequivocally with a criticism made of my article on his book, Art and Society.

After all a favorable review had appeared in the Worker two or so years ago and all that time had gone by without my writing a word about the book. The fact that there was no self-criticism in the article which was correct in basic content otherwise, was definitely a basic weakness.

Criticism and self-criticism is a law of growth for an individual Communist and the Communist movement as a whole. And when I omitted the self-criticism it was a reflection on my part of a failure to fully grasp the profound significance of this law.

Criticism and self-criticism is not simply a theoretical aspect of the Marxist movement: it is the indispensable tool, the weapon with which to improve ourselves and our work in the battle for peace and socialism.

Actually in a socialist society where class and class ~~antagonisms~~ antagonisms have been abolished, criticism and self-criticism is a basis for the development of that society. It has, naturally, also played a prominent role in the development of socialist realism.

THERE IS NO mystery about Socialist Realism. Based on fundamental Marxian principles, it has been utilized. As a matter of fact it was adopted openly and in print as the Marxist method of cultural work 16 years ago, in 1934, by the Union of Soviet Writers -- at a congress which was attended by prominent Marxist cultural figures of the time from all over the world. At that time the late, lamented Marxist genius, A. Zhdanov, defined the duties of Marxist writers. "In the first place, it means knowing life ~~as~~ to be able to depict ~~it~~

4

ELS
9-18-64

-2-

it in a dead, scholastic way, not simply as 'objective reality,' but to depict reality in its revolutionary development.

"In addition to this, the truthfulness and historical concreteness of the artistic portrayal should be combined with the ideological remoulding and education of the toiling people in the spirit of socialism. This method in belles lettres and literary criticism is what we call the method of socialist realism."

The international Marxist cultural movement, led by the Soviet Union's section, has written plenty about Socialist Realism. Since then, but ~~unfortunately~~ unfortunately, as we've said before, in this country, so far as I know, no American Marxist cultural figure published anything substantial on it, embraced it openly in print as our standard, in the last 10 years until Howard Fast's Literature and Reality appeared a few months ago. Not that Literature and Reality was perfect; but it did make the tremendous contribution of breaking through the written wall of silence here on the subject.

* * * * *

Is a one line of definition of the socialist realist method possible? Not in all its aspects, of course; ~~by~~ But Gorky, that great pioneer of socialist realism, once said that socialist writers must in their works perform the role of both "midwife and grave-digger." ~~digger.~~

"The job of our writers," he said on another occasion, "does not only consist in criticizing the old way of life and exposing the infectionness of its vices. Their task is to study, shape, depict, and thereby assert the new way of life."

Socialist realism differs from the ~~n~~ naturalism which ^{many} ~~may~~ mistakenly assume is realism. Naturalism is the method which merely tries to duplicate, to photograph as it were the detailed, static surface of realities with emphasis on the morbid ones. (Reality, that is not in motion, is actually a contradiction

in terms.) "We are interested in the accurate representation of what is, "Gorky wrote,"...because we require this for a more profound and clear understanding of everything we are pledged to eradicate, and of everything we must create."

Today, naturalism is one of the major methods of the man-is-hopeless-evil school which sometimes operates under a false cloak of "objectivity" but whose net result tends to paralyze action against oppression. Socialist Realism, in contrast, while not overlooking the ugly side of reality, depicts it in change, in development, with the new struggling against the rotting old.

Mayakovsky, the deceased great Soviet poet whose work Stalin hailed so enthusiastically, once wrote a defiant and vivid explanation in verse, of the kind of reality Communists believe in:

~~xxxxx~~ "we're realists also,

but not of the lickspittle

scum,

not grov'ling, with snouts to the ground,

we're one

with the new age to come."

SOCIALIST REALISM, in contrast to formalism, insists that the content, the meaning, of a work -- content that inspires man to fight for peace and a better life -- is primary; but insists on the attempt at mastery of form to match the high moral aim.

That high morality is the spirit of Communism. In formulating the principle of Party spirit of literature; Lenin emphasized that "the cause of literature must become part of the proletarian cause as a whole."

A truthful portrayal of life is possible only from the Marxian, class point of view. This is true not only in politics, economics, philosophy, etc., but also in art. A so-called non-partisan point of view can today only result ~~in a distorted and false picture of reality~~

ELS
3-18-64

6

in distortions, falseness, and comfort to the ruling class.

Because of their adherence to the principles of Socialist Realism the Soviet writers have produced a body of literature which far surpasses in quality the literature of any other country in this last period. There has been Gorky, Sholokhov, Ehrenbourg, Fadayev, A. Tolstoy and those other giants which the capitalist press iron curtain prevents most Americans from knowing -- much to this country's loss: Marshak; Bubennov, Panferov, Serafimovitch, Furmanov, Galin, Grossman, Tvardovsky, Berholtz, Pervomaisky and thousands of etceteras in all the far-flung republics of the U.S.S.R. where Stalin's principle of encouragement of national cultures -- national in form, socialist in content -- has resulted in the greatest cultural renaissance in the history of the world.

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AND LET NO one think that the application of socialist realism there has resulted in a dead uniformity of style. To the contrary. The truths of socialist realism are expressed in Soviet art in every conceivable form and style -- from the fantasy-using poetry of Tvardovsky, to the gay, satiric verse of Marshak, to the epic novel of Sholokhov, there is the richest multi-variety of form and style at the artist's disposal.

It is impossible in this limited space (it's hell writing on these questions in a daily space-limited newspaper) to deal with the many aspects of Socialist Realism. Questions which need plenty of discussion here, for example are: how the role of socialist realism differs concretely in a capitalist country like the U.S.A. from its role in a socialist country like the Soviet Union; the dominating part criticism and self-criticism play in Socialist Realism in the U.S.S.R. with its blessed lack of class antagonism; Socialist Realism and the task of supporting a national Negro culture here; the still-to-be-met task of presenting the fully-rounded out Communist hero in our cultural work; revolutionary romanticism and many more.

ELS
8-18-64

7

Also, although there's no room today to develop this point, it's important for us to keep in mind the fact that Marxists, not being sectarians, do not take a negative attitude to every work of art simply because its creator does not consciously adopt our Socialist Realist standard and method of work. We do and should adopt a positive attitude toward those artists and works of art which effectively expose the war-makers and the racists. It would be the height of folly, for example, to condemn out-of-hand a humane book which advances the cause of peace because it does not measure up in every way to our advanced standards. We maintain our standards, we do not liquidate our independent Marxist position; we reserve the right to criticize from that position; but at the same time we gladly join with and greet those cultural workers and creations which are on the side of progress and peace.)

Today, however, we want mainly to establish that there is and has been a definitely established Marxist method of cultural work accepted by Marxists the world over. When Finkelstein, like so many others, ignored this in his book, Art and Society, as well as in his recent piece in the Daily Worker, while claiming to write on culture as a Marxist, he was not at the time living up to his claim. A Socialist Realist approach would have prevented the mistakes mentioned in our first article. The concept of primacy of content would have rendered impossible the ignoring of the anti-Semitism of T.S. Eliot and Joyce's Ulysses. The principle of partisanship would have prevented the mistake of non-class approach.

IN THIS introductory piece we've done a lot of quoting. Permit me one more quote and it is done. It's from an impassioned speech by Aragon, the beloved French Communist writer, to a congress of writers -- the year, 1936:

"I proclaim the return to reality. This I say and who then will oppose me, if not those who have a vested interest in reality, who want to hide it from us."

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8

At a time when the bourgeois is abandoning all that there was of the light in the progress of its youth ... it can no longer suffer the thunder of reality, the very idea of reality. It needs now a stage setting ~~similar~~ similar to that grotesque Mystery of the Passion which on the square in front of the ~~cathedral~~ cathedral of Notre Dame conceals the police headquarters. We who are the allies of the revolutionary proletariat, its comrades in arms, have the duty of flinging to the winds this deception, we expect everything from reality's denunciations. We have ~~no~~ nothing to hide and that is why we hail as a word of joy the slogan of Soviet literature: Socialist Realism."

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ELS
9-18-64

June 2, 1958
OF C.P. IN 1950

USA
EDITOR OF The Daily Worker of his article on Sidney Finkelstein's Art and Society.
MEMBER OF
The National Cultural Commission has had to spend several meetings discussing the conduct of Comrade Barnard Rubin, a member of the Commission, in connection with the publication in

At the first of these meetings, the Commission unanimously endorsed the political substance of Comrade Rubin's article. At the same time, the Commission registered criticism of Rubin for 1) his failure to work collectively with the Commission, and 2) his failure to express self-criticism in his article. Comrade Rubin's statement at the end of the meeting was found unacceptable since he resisted the criticism of the Commission.

At a subsequent meeting Comrade Rubin, instead of coming forward with self-criticism for his conduct at the previous meeting, launched an attack on Comrade Jerome, falsely charging him with "dishonesty," with "slander" against Comrade Rubin that hampered the Party's fight against formalism, and with a questionable political motivation ("There's politics behind this.")

USA
At the following meeting of the Commission, on June 2, Comrade Jerome presented a report which gave a political characterization of Comrade Rubin's individualistic, ~~un-Communist~~ conduct and its effect on the work of the Commission. Comrade John Gates participated in the discussion on the invitation of Comrade Jerome. Comrade Gates identified himself with Comrade Jerome's basic criticism of Comrade Rubin. In addition to Comrade Jerome, the other members of the Commission who were present---Comrades Sillen, Pittman, Golden, H, and J---joined in criticism of Comrade Rubin's conduct. Comrade Rubin's answer to the report and the discussion was considered unsatisfactory, despite a very general statement of self-criticism. The following resolution was unanimously approved:

SAM SILLEN
MEMBERS OF The National Cultural Commission hereby registers severe censure of Comrade Barnard Rubin for petty-bourgeois individualistic conduct, failure to register self-criticism, resistance to self-criticism, and anti-leadership behavior.

Furthermore Comrade Rubin is to submit to the Commission within two weeks a statement evaluating his conduct. A motion calling for Rubin's political removal from the Commission and recommending his exclusion from a leading role as a Party cultural spokesman, was held in abeyance pending further study of his position.

Samuel Sillen
Secretary, Cultural Commission

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Comrade Jerome:

(on the request for a written statement on my
alleged remarks to Phil B.)

I can't recall all the details, since
that time I've been ^{at} ~~been~~ ⁱⁿ ~~been~~ of conferences, meetings, etc.
on this and the details are beginning to blur. To
the best of my memory it went something like this:

Phil was disturbed by the Frankelstein
piece -- very much upset and acted quite
emotional about it. I believe he said that
it was too harsh, the ~~the~~ tone made it sound
like Frankelstein was an enemy of the Party. I
said something to the effect that I hadn't called
Frankelstein an enemy of the Party in the piece --
but that I believed that the group of which
Frankelstein was a member had an anti-Marxist
line on culture. I also, I believe, said something
during the conversation something to the effect
that I wasn't alone in this opinion.

Now I've had this opinion for some
time -- before I was on the commission, as have
others. I do not remember mentioning the
Cultural Commission to Phil. I feel, however,
that my error here was in not keeping in
mind the fact that others know I'm a member
of the commission and can immediately deduce

other things ~~and~~ from that fact and an entirely
false impression can thereby arise. The responsibility
for that impression -- that which we discussed --
is mine, based on a politically wrong pattern of
behavior by myself as to how a commissioner
member should conduct herself.

Barnard Rubin

ELS
3-18-64

12

Dear Comrade Hall:

Some time ago I wrote you a letter containing accusations against Comrade Jerome.

I want to completely repudiate those accusations and my activities around them.

Those activities were politically wrong and you will find enclosed an attempt at a self-critical evaluation of those activities and some of the circumstances about them which I have submitted to the Cultural Commission.

Comradely yours,

Barnard Rubin

ELS
9-18-64

13

I agree unequivocally with the Commission's criticism that my article "Serious Errors in Finkelstein's 'Art and Society'" was lacking in self-criticism.

For two and a half years this book had been corrupting the cultural thinking of many in our movement. In effect, the book represented a liquidation of a Leninist line in culture. And, as cultural editor of the Daily Worker, I wrote not a word against it until the 'Serious Errors' article.

Yet, I neglected to mention this very obvious shortcoming in the article and criticize my remissness as editor. This was all the more necessary because of the fact that a favorable review of the book had appeared in the Worker Shortly after or around the time I became editor of the feature page. But nothing of this was mentioned in the article and yet I resisted the justified criticism of the Commission.

My resistance to that criticism in the Commission was caused by a subjective reluctance to accept criticism.

This in turn was caused by the failure on my part to fully grasp the meaning of and the necessity for self criticism in our movement.

Criticism and self criticism is the indispensable weapon of the Communist movement. Communists cannot improve themselves and their work in the struggle for peace and socialism without it. The failure to use this weapon while waging an ideological struggle -- despite the correctness of the main drive of that struggle -- was particularly unsound as the struggle itself is thereby negatively affected. For example, my original article on the book, although sound in its main line, was weakened by the failure to engage in the necessary self criticism.

ELG
3-18-64

14

ELS

3-18-64

This reflected on my part a failure to grasp the profound significance of criticism and self criticism -- not simply as a theoretical aspect of the Marxist movement, but as a law of growth for the individual Communist and the Communist movement as a whole.

The weakness of subjectivity was intensified by the failure to exercise self criticism and accept criticism -- intensified beyond an already existing intensity because of my subjective reaction in the past to a whispering belittling campaign against myself which overlapped -- and still does, in time -- with the present controversy. This campaign was and is based against my efforts in the past two and a half years to begin to carry out in my drama criticisms, special articles and my work in the feature page generally, a partisan, class-conscious line in culture: a line that attacks and exposes the reactionary culture of imperialism, and a line that fights for the encouragement of a working class culture in this country that would attack the ideology of imperialism on the cultural front. A line that fights against formalism, A line that supports the Soviet resolutions on the arts.

Errors were made of both ~~error~~ omission and commission in this fight. All throughout this fight, as I look back at it now, was the error of engaging in it without really utilizing the weapon of self-criticism. For if I had done so, the fight for the correct Marxist policy would have been much more effective. Weaknesses in style could have been dealt with effectively and the question of a certain crudeness in work could have been faced and handled.

A petty bourgeois egotism, a lack of Communist modesty, hindered correction of weaknesses in my work. For example, I would seldom if ever consult with Sam Sillen, say, on cultural problems. Yet Comrade Sillen has made contributions of the first rank to our movement. Contributions which I too have learned from; but yet my petty bourgeois egotism prevented me from consulting him, getting his opinion and advice when it would have been most helpful to the work I was doing for the paper.

15

225
8-18-64

These weaknesses are serious and the responsibility is mine to try to overcome them; but the whispering belittling, I'm talking about was not caused primarily by these weaknesses: it occurred primarily because of opposition to the campaign against formalist standards.

And here's where the failure to work self-critically, collectively and in a coordinated manner, began to steer me wrong. Instead of engaging in collective discussion with the responsible comrades involved on what to do about this whispering belittling -- and above all, how to better my work -- I became subjective, much more subjective than I realized at the time. Although I knew on the one hand that the whispering-belittling was politically motivated; on the other hand I reacted not politically -- but only personally.

* * *

When I originally wrote the Finkelstein piece I did not know of any attempt on the part of Finkelstein to re-evaluate, ~~re-evaluate~~ self-criticize his work. At that time the only thing I had heard was to the contrary. My article was not slipped in to the Daily Worker surreptitiously. I had talked about it with the chairman of the Cultural Commission. It was gone over thoroughly by Comrade John Gates, editor of the Daily Worker and a member of the National Committee-- and, as a matter of fact, some additional paragraphs were added at his suggestion.

Comrade Gates' suggestions were correct. In carrying them out, however, it was my mistake, arising out of my failure to work collectively and coordinatedly, that I did not consult with Comrade Jerome on the changed aspect of the article.

I mention the above only to explain how the circumstances around the publication of the article were, while to me subjectively, perfectly open and above-board, were although that, actually illustrations of my failure to work collectively and in a coordinated manner.

So here was an article written in context with the general line of the feature page; something written, from my own subjective viewpoint, with a

KE

16

ELS
9-18-64

perfectly clean conscience -- ~~and~~ with the knowledge and approval of my editor -- and with the chairman of the Commission having been talked to about it.

When the article appeared I was soon accused -- and I knew the rumors were spreading -- of having written the piece with the intent of pulling a cheap scoop to beat Finkelstein's self criticism. I was extremely angered by these attacks on my integrity. This was a new experience for me. I had been attacked several times over the years -- viciously -- in the capitalist press, but this hit me real hard. I saw my fellow workers on the paper being affected by the slanders. I saw a change of attitude on the part of comrades I respected and who up till then I thought had respected me. This was bitter stuff and my already inflamed subjectivity grew rapidly. I must admit I was ready to suspect comrades who didn't deserve it of joining hands with the foramlists in order to discredit me.

Then Comrade Jerome made it plain that he considered the publication of the article a deliberate attempt on my part at "beating the gun." That it was something discreditable because I had been present at a meeting of the Commission which had drawn up such concrete plans which would make the publication of an article criticising Finkelstein's book, again a cheap scoop, an attempt to beat the gun. I remembered no Commission meeting at which I was present where anything had been decided with which the publication of an article criticising Finkelstein's book would conflict. To the contrary, I thought at the time that the article would actually fit in with the Commission's general orientation on the anti-Marxist thesis of Finkelstein's book and the condemnatory report to the Commission on the forum group of which Finkelstein was a leading member and its anti-Marxist line in culture. Certainly, I had never been aware from any Commission meeting up to that time that Finkelstein was writing self-criticism. My only impressions from Commission meetings up to that time, were, if anything, to the contrary. When other members of the Commission (as it turned out later -- with myself a majority --

17

ELS
9-18-64

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when Comrade Jerome polled them on the question of whether they recalled a meeting which had taken steps which would have prohibited the publication of an article criticising (inkelstein's book) remembered no such meeting, this fact plus the fact that I knew I had talked to Comrade Jerome of the article before its publication, convinced me in my intensely subjective mood, that Comrade Jerome had joined and was now deliberately leading the current slander campaign against me. When I was told, or when he told me he was in favor of closing discussion on the article -- I wanted it opened -- I became even more convinced. My subjectivity was leading me to the point where I believed that Comrade Jerome's political activity on this issue was aiding the formalists and the enemies of the Marxist line on culture. More -- I sent a letter to Comrade Gus Hall which incorporated these beliefs.

This response, arising fundamentally from my petty-bourgeois egotism and individualist, non-collective and non-coordinated methods of work, resulted in my believing something about Comrade Jerome which only a short time before I would have repudiated -- and which led me to an action smacking of factionalism.

This action smacked not only of factionalism but also of lack of confidence in leadership. A calm and objective state of mind would have made it quite plain to me that if I had any serious differences with any of the comrades involved that these differences not based on fundamental ideology or line -- could have been thrashed out without leaving any stone unturned in the effort to do so. But my subjectivity led me to believe that none of the comrades involved could give the matter the kind of attention I thought it deserved so that I resorted to the most improper and non-Communist activity.

All this came out of a petty bourgeois egotistical frame of mind which if unchecked could take on ~~the~~ aspects of megalomania.

18

ELS
9-18-44

I am grateful for the criticisms of Comrades Jerome and Comrade John Gates for forcefully pointing this out.

This kind of petty bourgeois egotism and lack of confidence in leadership was reflected in the commission meeting in which I charged Comrade Jerome with slander. I lost my temper, refused to accept Comrade Jerome's explanation -- casting aspersions on their truthfulness. This was something completely uncalled for and a serious injustice to Comrade Jerome in addition to being a reflection on my part of a tendency to factionalism and lack of confidence in leadership. I want to completely repudiate everything said and done by myself at that commission meeting.

Those actions and the other proved that I was not yet ready to assume the responsibilities or live up to the high standards of conduct and behaviour required for membership on a commission of the National Committee of the Communist Party.

The fact of the matter is that some time ago, I had come to Comrade Jerome to tell him that I had become aware of the fact that he had been for some time the subject of a whispering, belittling campaign. And that I had become convinced, on the basis of my own experience, that this was promoted, at bottom, by those who consciously or unconsciously opposed a Marxist line on culture. I expressed my admiration for Comrade Jerome for sticking to that line. And I believed this up to the time I convinced myself otherwise on the basis of an emotional rather than a politically sound reaction.

It is obvious to me now that I have done Comrade Jerome an injustice. I offer him my sincere apologies. I am self-critically writing Comrade Hall of this in retraction of my previous letter.

Also clear to me now is how a subjective, non-self-critical approach, as I had, can help create a situation which hinders the unity of those forces which should logically be united, fighting for the correct policy.

19

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